

Working Remotely: Best Practices

Now that we have temporarily become a virtual workplace, it's a good time to brush up on best practices for remote communication. Making the switch from an office to a home work environment isn't always easy. It's important to establish some ground rules for yourself from the start, and to learn how best to take advantage of all that technology has to offer. Here are some tips and tricks:

Establish a routine. Don't treat your work-at-home weekday like a weekend. Get up at the same time every morning, go through your usual morning routine, get dressed, and sit down at a desk or table to start your day. Try to designate a clean, organized space in your home that isn't too noisy or distracting, perhaps separate from your "living" space. A routine will help you adjust to the new normal of working from home.

Get your tech set up. With your laptop, phone and WiFi connection, you should be in good shape, as your computer has all the tools you need for communicating with your manager and teams. If you need tech help, don't hesitate to ask.

Take breaks, but limit distractions. It's great to get up, stretch your legs, go outside for some fresh air, sit somewhere else entirely for lunch, or otherwise take a break. But don't put in a load of laundry or run a quick errand, at least not during work hours. The nice thing about your new-found flexibility is you have no commute and therefore more time for these things after hours!

Communicate frequently. Let your manager know how your day is going and if you have questions or concerns about your work. Use instant messaging, a chat function, email, or your phone to check in at least once a day. Answer emails and return calls promptly. Remote work requires a dedication to communicating often and clearly to ensure everyone on the team is on the same page.

Use videoconferencing. To ensure meaningful connectivity with colleagues and clients, it's important to see each other and at least simulate the feeling of being together. Here are some important things to keep in mind to make it successful:

- Make sure you have a good WiFi connection
- Collect all materials you may need to access during the meeting so you have them at your fingertips
- Dial in a couple minutes ahead of time to make sure the technology is working
- Mute your phone or computer to reduce background noise when you are not talking
- Follow these tips for your appearance on the video:
 - Your head and shoulders should be visible and in focus
 - Dress appropriately (from the waist up at least!)
 - To avoid glare, it's best not to have a window behind you, or make sure to pull shades down during the day to even out the lighting in the room
 - Look into the camera, not at your screen, when you are talking
 - Ensure you are in a quiet space free of noise, other people or pets at home, and other possible interruptions

- Be present and pay attention. Don't work on other things, fiddle with your phone, or try to multi-task while you are on the call, as it will be distracting to others
- Take good notes and share action items with teammates or clients after the call

Choose the right type of communication. Different modes of communication work better for different objectives. Know when to use email, text, phone, or chat at the right time, and use your best judgment depending on the individual with whom you're communicating.

- **Text or chat** is best when you have a short question that should have a short answer.
- **Call** when your discussion is too complex to handle any other way, or when you need something immediately.
- **Email** is often the best choice, but use it effectively. If you have a number of questions on the same subject for the same person, put them all in one email in an organized fashion, rather than sending a series of one-off emails. Use email when your request does not have an immediate deadline, or when you need to spell something out in detail (but not too much detail!)
- **Video conferences or virtual meetings** are necessary when you need to discuss something with someone in more depth than you could via any other method. Set an agenda ahead of time to make the best use of everyone's time.

Establish boundaries. The lines between work and life can get blurry, especially when you are working remotely. Create boundaries between the two by sticking to the routine mentioned above. Make sure to take time for your health and wellbeing, and for connections with family and friends. Unplugging is healthy and necessary.

Stay connected and positive. Working from home may feel novel and fun at first, but it can be isolating. Make sure you stay connected with your co-workers in positive ways, stay visible with your teams, and reach out if you're feeling disconnected. The upside of remote work is higher productivity than you may have ever imagined!